

PD WEEKLY, JULY 28, 2017



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**PROSPER MÉRIMÉE
BELGIAN POETS
ANTON CHEKHOV
AUGUST STRINDBERG**

France, Belgium, Russia, and Sweden are represented in this week's issue. Editor: Matt Pierard.

THE VENUS OF ILLE

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Abbé Aubain and Mosaics*, by Prosper Mérimée
Translator: Emily Mary Walker

[Greek: *Ileoos ein d'ego, esto o andrias
kai eipios, outoos andreios oon.*

LOUKIANOU PHIOPSEUDES.]

I descended the last hillside at Canigou, and, although the sun had already set, I could distinguish the houses of the little town of Ille, in the plain, towards which my steps were turned.

"You know," I said to the Catalanian who had been my guide since the previous day--"no doubt you know where M. de Peyrehorade lives?"

"Do I know it!" he exclaimed. "I know his house as well as I know my own; and if it wasn't so dark I would point it out to you. It is the prettiest in Ille. M. de Peyrehorade is a rich man; and he is marrying his son to a lady even richer than himself."

"Is the marriage to take place soon?" I asked.

"Very soon; probably the violinists are already ordered for the wedding. Perhaps it will be to-night, or to-morrow, or the day after, for all I know. It will be at Pugarrig; for the son is to marry Mademoiselle de Pugarrig. It will be a very grand affair!"

I had been introduced to M. de Peyrehorade by my friend M. de P., who told me he was a very learned antiquarian and of extreme good nature. It would give him pleasure to show me all the ruins for ten leagues round. So I was looking forward to visit with him the district surrounding Ille, which I knew to be rich in monuments belonging to ancient times and the Middle Ages. This marriage, of which I now heard for the first time, would upset all my plans. I said to myself, I should be a kill-joy; but I was expected, and as M. de P. had written to say I was coming, I should have to present myself.

"I will bet you, Monsieur," said my guide to me, when we were in the plain--"I will bet you a cigar that I can guess why you are going to M. de Peyrehorade's."

"But that is not a difficult thing to guess," I replied, holding out a cigar to him. "At this hour, after traversing six leagues amongst the Canigou hills, the grand question is supper."

"Yes, but to-morrow?... Wait, I will bet that you have come to Ille to see the statue. I guessed that when I saw you draw pictures of the

Saints at Serrabona."

"The statue! What statue?" The word had excited my curiosity.

"What! did no one tell you at Perpignan that M. de Peyrehorade had found a statue in the earth?"

"Did you mean a statue in terra-cotta, or clay?"

"Nothing of the kind. It is actually in copper, and there is enough of it to make heaps of coins. It weighs as much as a church bell. It is deep in the ground, at the foot of an olive tree that we dug up."

"You were present, then, at the find?"

"Yes, sir. M. de Peyrehorade told Jean Coll and me, a fortnight ago, to uproot an old olive tree which had been killed by the frost last year, for there was a very severe frost, you will remember. Well, then, whilst working at it with all his might, Jean Coll gave a blow with his pickaxe, and I heard bimm!... as though he had struck on a bell. 'What is that?' I said. He picked and picked again, and a black hand appeared, which looked like the hand of a dead man coming out of the ground. I felt frightened; I went to the master and said to him: 'There are dead folk, master, under the olive tree; I wish you would send for the priest.' 'What dead folk?' he asked. He came, and had no sooner seen the hand than he cried out, 'An antique statue! an antique statue!' You might have thought he had discovered a treasure. And then he set to with pickaxe and hands, and worked hard; he did almost as much work as the two of us together."

"And what did you find in the end?"

"A huge black woman, more than half naked, saving your presence, sir, all in copper, and M. de Peyrehorade told us that it was an idol of pagan times ... perhaps as old as Charlemagne!"

"I see what it is ... some worthy Virgin in bronze which belonged to a convent that has been destroyed."

"The Blessed Virgin! Well, I never!... I should very soon have known if it had been the Blessed Virgin. I tell you it is an idol; you can see that plainly from its appearance. It stares at you with its great white eyes.... You might have said it was trying to put you out of countenance. It was enough to make one ashamed to look at her."

"White eyes were they? No doubt they are inlaid in the bronze; it might perhaps be a Roman statue."

"Roman! that's it. M. de Peyrehorade said that it was Roman. Ah! I can see you are as learned as he is."

"Is it whole and in good preservation?"

"Oh, it is all there, sir. It is much more beautiful and better finished than the painted plaster bust of Louis Philippe, which is at the town hall. But for all that the idol's face is not very nice to look at. She looks wicked ... and she is so, too."

"Wicked! What mischief has she done you?"

"No mischief to me exactly; but I will tell you. We were down on all fours to raise her up on end, and M. de Peyrehorade was also tugging at the rope, although he had no more strength than a chicken, good man! With much trouble he got her straight. I picked up a tile to prop her up, when, good Lord! she fell upside down all in a heap. 'Look out there below!' I said, but I was not quick enough, for Jean Coll had not time to draw his leg out...."

"And was it hurt?"

"His poor leg was broken as clean as a pole. Goodness! when I saw it I was furious. I wanted to break up the idol with my pickaxe, but M. de Peyrehorade would not let me. He gave some money to Jean Coll, who, all the same, has been in bed the whole fortnight since it happened, and the doctor says that he will never walk with that leg again so well as with the other. It is a sad pity; he was our best runner, and, after M. de Peyrehorade's son, he was the cleverest tennis player. M. Alphonse de Peyrehorade was dreadfully sorry, for it was Coll against whom he played. It was fine to see them send the balls flying. Whizz! whizz! they never touched the ground."

And so we chatted till we reached Ille, and I very soon found myself in the presence of M. de Peyrehorade. He was a little old man, still hale and active; he was powdered, had a red nose, and his manner was jovial and bantering. When he had opened M. de P.'s letter he installed me in front of a well-appointed table and presented me to his wife and son as an illustrious archaeologist, whose desire it was to raise the province of Roussillon from obscurity, in which it had been left by the neglect of the learned.

Whilst I was eating with a good appetite--for nothing makes one so hungry as mountain air--I examined my hosts. I have said a word or two about M. de Peyrehorade; I should add that he was vivacity itself. He talked and ate, got up, ran to his library to bring me books, showed me engravings, and poured out drinks for me; he was never still for two minutes. His wife was rather too stout, like most Catalanian women over forty, and she seemed to me a regular provincial, solely taken up with the cares of her household. Although the supper was ample for six people at least, she ran to the kitchen, had pigeons killed and dozens of them fried, besides opening I don't know how many pots of preserves. In a

trice the table was loaded with dishes and bottles, and I should assuredly have died of indigestion if I had even tasted all that was offered me. However, at each dish that I refused there were fresh excuses. They were afraid I did not get what I liked at Ille--there are so few means of getting things in the provinces, and Parisians are so hard to please!

M. Alphonse de Peyrehorade stirred no more than a statue in the midst of his parents' comings and goings. He was a tall young man of twenty-six, with beautiful and regular features, but they were wanting in expression. His figure and athletic build quite justified the reputation he had gained in the country as an indefatigable tennis player. He was that evening exquisitely dressed, exactly like the latest fashion plate. But he seemed to me to be uneasy in his garments; he was as stiff as a post in his velvet collar, and could not turn round unless with his whole body. His fat and sunburnt hands, with their short nails, contrasted strangely with his costume. They were the hands of a labouring man appearing below the sleeves of a dandy. For the rest, he only addressed me once throughout the whole evening, and that was to ask me where I had bought my watch-chain, although he studied me from head to foot very inquisitively in uncapacity as a Parisian.

"Ah, now, my honoured guest," said M. de Peyrehorade to me when supper drew to its conclusion, "you belong to me. You are in my house, and I shall not give you any rest until you have seen all the curiosities among our mountains. You must learn to know our Roussillon and to do it justice. You have no idea what we can show you--Phoenician, Celtic, Roman, Arabesque and Byzantine monuments. You shall see them all--lock, stock and barrel. I will take you everywhere, and will not let you off a single stone."

A fit of coughing compelled him to stop. I took advantage of it to tell him I should be greatly distressed if I disturbed him during the interesting event about to take place in his family. If he would kindly give me the benefit of his valuable advice about the excursion I ought to take, I should be able to go without putting him to the inconvenience of accompanying me....

"Ah, you are referring to this boy's marriage!" he exclaimed, interrupting me. "That is all nonsense. It takes place the day after to-morrow. You shall celebrate the wedding with us; it will take place quietly, for the bride is in mourning for an aunt, whose heiress she is. Therefore there is to be neither fête nor ball.... It is a pity.... You would have seen our Catalanian women dance.... They are pretty, and you might perhaps have been tempted to follow Alphonse's example. One marriage, they say, leads to others.... On Saturday, after the young people are married, I shall be at liberty, and we will set out. I ask your forgiveness for the irksomeness of a provincial wedding. To a Parisian blasé with fêtes ... and a wedding without a ball too! However, you will see a bride ... such a bride ... you must tell me what you

think of her.... But you are not a frivolous man, and you take no notice of women. I have better things than women to show you. I am going to show you something! I have a fine surprise for you to-morrow."

"Ah," I replied, "it is not easy to have a treasure in your house without the public knowing all about it. I think I can guess the surprise you have in store for me. You are thinking of your statue. I am quite prepared to admire it, for my guide's description if it has roused my curiosity."

"Ah! he told you about the idol, for that is what they call my beautiful Venus Tur--but I will not talk of it. To-morrow, as soon as it is daylight, you shall see her, and you shall tell me if I am not right in considering her a *chef-d'oeuvre*. Upon my word, you could not have arrived at a better time! There are inscriptions which poor ignorant I explain after my own fashion ... but a savant from Paris!... You will probably laugh at my interpretation, for I have written a treatise on it.... I--an old provincial antiquarian--I am going to venture.... I mean to make the press groan. If you would be so good as to read and correct it, I should be hopeful.... For example, I am curious to know how you would translate this inscription on the pedestal: '*CAVE*'but I do not want to ask you anything yet! To-morrow, to-morrow! Not a single word about the Venus to-day."

"You are quite right, Peyrehorade," said his wife, "to stop talking about your idol; you ought to see that you are preventing the gentleman from eating. Why, he has seen far more beautiful statues in Paris than yours. There are dozens of them in the Tuileries, and in bronze too."

"Just look at her ignorance--the blessed ignorance of the provinces!" interrupted M. de Peyrehorade. "Fancy, comparing a splendid antique statue to the flat figures of Coustou!"

"How irreverently of my affairs
The gods are pleased to talk!"

"Do you know my wife wanted to have my statue melted down to make a bell for our church? She would have been its godmother--one of Myro's *chef-d'oeuvres*."

"*Chef-d'oeuvre!* *chef-d'oeuvre!* *a fine chef-d'oeuvre* it is to break a man's leg!"

"Look here, wife," said M. de Peyrehorade in a determined voice, as he extended his right leg towards her, clad in a fine silk stocking, "if my Venus had broken this leg I should not have minded."

"Good gracious! Peyrehorade, how can you talk like that? Fortunately, the man is going on well.... And yet I cannot bring myself to look at the statue which did such an evil thing as that. Poor Jean Coll!"

"Wounded by Venus, sir," said M. de Peyrehorade, laughing loudly. "The rascal complains of being wounded by Venus!"

"*Veneris nec praemia nôris.*'

Who has not suffered from the wounds of Venus?"

M. Alphonse, who understood French better than Latin, winked with an understanding air, and looked at me as though to say, "Do you understand that, you Parisian?"

Supper ended at last. For an hour I had not been able to eat any more. I was tired, and could not hide my frequent yawns. Madam de Peyrehorade saw it first, and said that it was time to retire. Then began fresh apologies for the poor entertainment I should find. I should not be comfortable as in Paris; in the country things are so different! I must make allowances for the people of Roussillon. It was in vain I protested that after a journey among the mountains a bundle of straw would seem a delicious bed. They still begged me to pardon their poor rustic servants if they did not behave as well as they should. At last, accompanied by M. de Peyrehorade, I reached the room put apart for my use. The staircase, the top steps of which were of wood, led to the centre of a corridor, out of which opened several rooms.

"To the right," said my host, "is the set of rooms that I intend for the future Madam Alphonse. Your room is at the end of the passage opposite. You will understand," he added, with a look which he meant to be sly--"you will readily understand that newly married people wish to be by themselves. You are at one end of the house and they at the other."

We entered a very handsomely furnished room, where the first object that caught my eye was a bed seven feet long, six broad, and such a height that one needed a stool to get into it. My host pointed out the position of the bell, and satisfied himself that the sugar-bowl was full, and the smelling-bottles of eau de Cologne in their proper places on the toilette table; then he asked me repeatedly if I had all I wanted, wished me good-night and left me alone.

The windows were shut. Before undressing, I opened one to breathe the cool night air, which was delicious after such a lengthy supper. In front was Canigou Mountain, which is at all times beautiful, but to-night it seemed the fairest in the world, lighted up as it was by a splendid moon. I stood a few minutes to contemplate its marvellous outline, and was just going to close my window when, lowering my gaze, I saw the statue on a pedestal about forty yards from the house. It was placed in a corner of the quick-set hedge which separated a little garden from a large, perfectly level court, which, I learnt later, was the tennis ground for the town. This ground had been M. de Peyrehorade's property, but he had given it to the public at his son's urgent

entreaties.

From my distance away it was difficult to make out the form of the statue; I could only judge of its height, which I guessed was about six feet. At that moment two town larrikins passed along the tennis court, close to the hedge, whistling the pretty Roussillon air, "Montagnes régalandes." They stopped to look at the statue, and one of them even apostrophised her in a loud voice. He spoke the Catalanian dialect, but I had been long enough in the province of Roussillon to be able to understand almost all he said.

"Chi-ike, huzzy!" (the Catalanian expression was more forcible than that). "Look here," he said, "you broke Jean Coll's leg for him! If you belonged to me I would have broken your neck."

"Bah! what with?" asked the other. "She is made of copper, and so hard that Stephen broke his file over it, trying to cut into it. It is copper from before the Flood, and harder than anything I can think."

"If I had my cold chisel" (apparently he was a locksmith's apprentice) "I would jolly soon scoop out her big white eyes; it would be like cracking a couple of nutshells for the kernels. I would do it for a bob."

They moved a few paces further off.

"I must just wish the idol good night," said the tallest of the apprentices, stopping suddenly.

He stooped, and probably picked up a stone. I saw him stretch out his arm and throw something, and immediately after I heard a resounding blow from the bronze. At the same moment the apprentice raised his hand to his head and yelled out in pain.

"She has thrown it back at me!" he cried.

And then the two scamps took to flight as fast as they could. The stone had evidently rebounded from the metal, and had punished the rascal for the outrage done to the goddess.

I shut the window and laughed heartily.

Yet another vandal punished by Venus! Would that all destroyers of our ancient monuments could have their heads broken like that!

And with this charitable wish I fell asleep.

It was broad day when I awoke. Near my bed on one side stood M. de Peyrehorade in a dressing-gown; on the other a servant sent by his wife with a cup of chocolate in his hand.

"Come now, Parisian, get up! How lazy you people from the capital are!" said my host, while I hastily dressed myself. "It is eight o'clock, and you still in bed. I got up at six o'clock. I have been upstairs three times; I listened at your door on tiptoe, but there was no sign of life at all. It is bad for you to sleep too much at your age. And my Venus waiting to be seen! Come, take this cup of Barcelona chocolate as fast as you can ... it is quite contraband. You can't get such chocolate in Paris. Take in all the nourishment you can, for when you are before my Venus no one will be able to tear you away."

I was ready in five minutes; that is to say, I was only half shaved, wrongly buttoned and scalded by the chocolate which I had swallowed boiling hot. I went downstairs into the garden and was soon in front of a wonderfully fine statue. It was indeed a Venus of extraordinary beauty. The top part of her body was bare, just as the ancients usually depicted their great deities; her right hand, raised up to her breast, was bent, with the palm inwards, the thumb and two first fingers extended, whilst the other two were slightly curved. The other hand was near the hips, and held up the drapery which covered the lower part of the body. The attitude of this statue reminded me of that of the Morra player, which, for some reason or other, goes by the name of Germanicus. Perhaps they wished to depict the goddess playing at the game of Morra.

However that might be, it is impossible to conceive anything more perfect than the body of this Venus; nothing could be more harmonious or more voluptuous than its outlines, nothing more graceful or dignified than its drapery. I expected some work of the Lower Empire, and I beheld a masterpiece of the most perfect period of sculpture. I was specially struck with the exquisite truth of form, which gave the impression that it had been moulded by nature itself, if nature ever produces such perfect specimens.

The hair, which was raised off the forehead, looked as though it might have been gilded at some time. The head was small, like those of nearly all Greek statues, and bent slightly forward. As to the face, I should never be able to express its strange character; it was of quite a different type from that of any other antique statue I could recall to mind. It was not only the calm and austere beauty of the Greek sculptors, whose rule was to give a majestic immobility to every feature. Here, on the contrary, I noticed with astonishment that the artist had purposely expressed ill-nature to the point even of wickedness. Every feature was slightly contracted: the eyes were rather slanting, the mouth turned up at the corners, and the nostrils somewhat inflated. Disdain, irony, cruelty, could be traced on a face which was, notwithstanding, of incredible beauty. Indeed, the longer one looked at this wonderful statue, the more did the distressing thought obtrude itself that such marvellous beauty could be united with an utter absence of goodness.

"If the model ever existed," I said to M. de Peyrehorade, "and I doubt if Heaven ever produced such a woman, how I pity her lovers! She would delight to make them die of despair. There is something ferocious in her expression, and yet I never saw anything so beautiful."

"It is Venus herself gloating over her prey,"

cried M. de Peyrehorade, pleased with my enthusiasm.

That expression of fiendish scorn was perhaps enhanced by the contrast shown by her eyes, which were encrusted with silver, and shone brilliantly with the greenish-black colour that time had given to the whole statue. Those brilliant eyes produced a kind of illusion which recalled lifelike reality. I remembered what my guide had said, that she made those who looked at her lower their eyes. It was quite true, and I could hardly restrain an impulse of anger against myself for feeling rather ill at ease before that bronze face.

"Now that you have admired it minutely, my dear colleague in antiquarian research," said my host, "let us, by your leave, open a scientific conference. What say you to that inscription, which you have not yet noticed?"

He showed me the pedestal of the statue, and I read on it these words:--

CAVE AMANTEM

Quid dicis, doctissime?" he asked me, rubbing his hands together.
"Let us see if we can hit on the meaning of this _CAVE AMANTEM_."

"But," I answered, "it has two meanings. It can be translated: 'Beware of him who loves thee; mistrust thy lovers.' But in that sense I do not know whether _CAVE AMANTEM_ would be good Latin. Looking at the lady's diabolic expression, I would rather believe that the artist intended to put the spectator on his guard against her terrible beauty; I would therefore translate it: 'Beware if _she_ loves thee.'"

"Humph!" said M. de Peyrehorade; "yes, that is an admissible interpretation; but, without wishing to displease you, I prefer the first translation, and I will tell you why. You know who Venus's lover was?"

"There were several."

"Yes, but the chief one was Vulcan. Should one not rather say, 'In spite of all thy beauty and thy scornful manner, thou shalt have for thy lover a blacksmith, a hideous cripple'? What a profound moral, Monsieur, for flirts!"

I could hardly help smiling at this far-fetched explanation.

"Latin is a difficult tongue, because of its concise expression," I remarked, to avoid contradicting my antiquarian friend outright; and I stepped further away to see the statue better.

"One moment, colleague," said M. de Peyrehorade, seizing me by the arm, "you have not seen everything. There is still another inscription. Climb up on the pedestal and look at the right arm." And saying this, he helped me up.

I held on to the neck of the Venus unceremoniously, and began to make myself better acquainted with her. I only looked at her for a moment, right in the face, and I found her still more wicked, and still more beautiful. Then I discovered that there were some written characters in an ancient, running hand, it seemed to me, engraved on the arm. With the help of spectacles I spelt out the following, whilst M. de Peyrehorade repeated every word as soon as pronounced, with approving gesture and voice. It read thus:--

_VENERI TVRBVL ...
_EVTYCHES MYRO
IMPERIO FECIT.

After the word TVRBVL in the first line, I thought some letters had been effaced; but TVRBVL was perfectly legible.

"What do you say to that?" asked my host, radiantly smiling with malice, for he knew very well that I could not easily extricate myself from this TVRBVL.

"I cannot explain that word yet," I said to him, "all the rest is easy. By his order Eutyches Myro made this great offering to Venus."

"Good. But what do you make of TVRBVL? What is TVRBVL?"

"TVRBVL puzzles me greatly; I cannot think of any epithet applied to Venus which might assist me. Stay, what do you say to TVRBVLENTA? Venus, who troubles and disturbs.... You notice I am all the time thinking of her malignant expression. TVRBVLENTA would not be at all a bad epithet for Venus," I added modestly, for I was not myself quite satisfied with my explanation.

"Venus the turbulent! Venus the broiler! Ah! you think, then, that my Venus is a Venus of the pot-house? Nothing of the kind, Monsieur. She is a Venus belonging to the great world. And now I will expound to you this TVRBVL.... You will at least promise not to divulge my discovery before my treatise is published. I shall become famous, you see, by this find.... You must leave us poor provincial devils a few ears to glean. You Parisian savants are rich enough."

From the top of the pedestal, where I still perched, I solemnly promised that I would never be so dishonourable as to steal his discovery.

"_TVRBVL_ ... Monsieur," he said, coming nearer and lowering his voice for fear anyone else but myself should hear, "read _TVRBVLNERÆ_."

"I do not understand any better."

"Listen carefully. A league from here, at the base of the mountain, is a village called Boulternère. It is a corruption of the Latin word _TVRBVLNERA_. Nothing is commoner than such an inversion. Boulternère, Monsieur, was a Roman town. I have always been doubtful about this, for I have never had any proof of it. The proof lies here. This Venus was the local goddess of the city of Boulternère; and this word Boulternère, which I have just shown to be of ancient origin, proves a still more curious thing, namely that Boulternère, after being a Roman town, became a Phoenician one!"

He stopped a minute to take breath, and to enjoy my surprise. I had to repress a strong inclination to laugh.

"Indeed," he went on, "_TVRBVLNERA_ is pure Phoenician. _TVR_ pronounce _TOUR.... TOUR_ and _SOUR_, are they not the same word? _SOUR_ is the Phoenician name for Tyre. I need not remind you of its meaning. _BVL_ is Baal, Bâl, Bel, Bul, slight differences in pronunciation. As to _NERA_, that gives me some trouble. I am tempted to think, for want of a Phoenician word, that it comes from the [Greek _neiros_]--damp, marshy. That would make it a hybrid word. To justify [Greek _neiros_] I will show you at Boulternère how the mountain streams there form poisonous swamps. On the other hand, the ending _NERA_ might have been added much later, in honour of Nera Pivesuvia, the wife of Tetricus, who may have done some benevolent act to the city of Turbul. But, on account of the marshes, I prefer the derivation from [Greek _neiros_]."

He took a pinch of snuff with a satisfied air.

"But let us leave the Phoenicians and return to the inscription. I translate, then: 'To the Venus of Boulternère Myro dedicates by his command this statue, the work of his hand.'"

I took good care not to criticise his etymology, but I wanted, on my own account, to put his penetrative faculties to the proof, so I said to him: "Wait a bit, Monsieur, Myro dedicated something, but I do not in the least see that it was this statue."

"What!" he exclaimed, "was not Myro a famous Greek sculptor? The talent would descend to his family; and one of his descendants made this statue. Nothing can be clearer."

"But," I replied, "I see a little hole in the arm. I fancy it has been

used to hold something, perhaps a bracelet, which this Myro gave to Venus as an expiatory offering, for Myro was an unlucky lover. Venus was incensed against him, and he appeased her by consecrating a golden bracelet. You must remember that fecit is often used for consecravit. The terms are synonymous. I could show you more than one instance if I had access to Gruter or, better still, Orellius. It is natural that a lover should behold Venus in his dreams, and that he should imagine that she commanded him to give her statue a golden bracelet. Myro consecrated a bracelet to her.... Then the barbarians, or perhaps some sacrilegious thief--"

"Ah! it is easily seen that you are given to romancing," cried my host, lending his hand to help me down. "No, Monsieur, it is a work after the School of Myro. Only look at the work, and you will agree."

Having made it a rule never to contradict pig-headed antiquarians outright, I bowed my head as though convinced, and said--

"It is a splendid piece of work."

"Ah! my God!" exclaimed M. de Peyrehorade, "here is yet another mark of vandalism! Someone has thrown a stone at my statue!"

He had just seen a white mark a little below the breast of the Venus. I noticed a similar mark on the fingers of the right hand, which at first I supposed had been scraped by the stone in passing, or perhaps a fragment of it might have broken off by the shock and rebounded upon the hand. I told my host the insult that I had witnessed and the prompt punishment which had followed. He laughed heartily, and compared the apprentice to Diomede, wishing he might see all his comrades changed into white birds, as the Greek hero did.

The breakfast bell interrupted this famous interview; and, as on the previous evening, I was forced to eat as much as four people. Then M. de Peyrehorade's tenants came to see him, and, whilst he gave them audience, his son took me to see a carriage which he had bought for his fiancée at Toulouse, and, of course, I admired it properly. After that I went with him to the stables, where he kept me half an hour praising his horses and telling me their pedigrees and the prizes he had won at the country races. At last he spoke of his future bride, by a sudden transition from the grey mare that he intended for her.

"We shall see her to-day. I wonder if you will think her pretty. You are so difficult to please in Paris; but everybody here and at Perpignan thinks her lovely. The best of it is she is very wealthy. Her aunt, who lived at Prades, left her all her money. Oh, I am going to be ever so happy!"

I was deeply shocked to see a young man much more affected by the dowry than by the beautiful looks of his bride-to-be.

"Are you learned in jewellery?" continued M. Alphonse. "What do you think of this ring which I am going to give her to-morrow?"

So saying, he drew from the first joint of his little finger a large ring blazing with diamonds, formed by the clasping of two hands: a most poetic idea, I thought. It was of ancient workmanship, but I guessed that it had been retouched when the diamonds were set. Inside the ring was engraved in gothic letters: "Sempr' ab ti" ("Ever thine").

"It is a lovely ring," I said; but added, "the diamonds have taken from its original character somewhat."

"Oh, it is much prettier as it is now," he replied, smiling. "There are one thousand two hundred francs' worth of diamonds in it. My mother gave it me. It was an old family ring ... from the days of chivalry. It was worn by my grandmother, who had it from her grandmother. Goodness knows when it was made!"

"The custom in Paris," I said, "is to give a very plain ring, usually made of two different metals, say, gold and platinum. For instance, the other ring which you have on that finger would be most suitable. This one is so large, with its diamonds and hands in relief, that no glove would go over it."

"Oh, Madam Alphonse can arrange that as she likes. I think she will be pleased enough to have it. Twelve hundred francs on one's finger is very pleasing. That little ring," he added, looking with a satisfied expression at the plain ring which he held in his hand, "was given me one Shrove Tuesday by a woman in Paris, when I was staying there two years ago. Ah! that is the place to enjoy oneself in!..." And he sighed regretfully.

We were to dine at Puygarrig that day, at the house of the bride's parents; we drove in carriages, and were soon at the Castle, which was about a league and a half from Ille. I was introduced and received like one of the family. I will not talk of the dinner, nor of the conversation which took place, and in which I had but little part. M. Alphonse, who sat by the side of his future bride, whispered in her ear every quarter of an hour. She hardly raised her eyes, and blushed modestly every time her intended spoke to her, though she replied without embarrassment.

Mademoiselle de Puygarrig was eighteen years of age, and her lithe, delicate figure was a great contrast to the bony limbs of her sturdy lover. She was more than beautiful: she was enchanting. I admired the perfect naturalness of all her replies. Her expression was kindly, but nevertheless was not devoid of a light touch of maliciousness which reminded me, do what I would, of my host's Venus. While making this comparison to myself I wondered if the superior beauty which undoubtedly

belonged to the statue was not largely owing to her tigerish expression, for strength, even when accompanied by evil passions, always induces wonder and a sort of involuntary admiration.

What a pity, I reflected, as we left Puygarrig, that such a charming person should be so rich, and that her dowry should be the cause of her being sought by a man so unworthy of her!

Whilst on the return to Ille I found it difficult to know what to talk of to Madam de Peyrehorade, with whom I thought I ought to converse.

"You are very strong-minded people here in Roussillon," I exclaimed, "to have a wedding on a Friday. In Paris we are more superstitious; no man dare take a wife on that day."

"Oh, please don't talk of it," she said; "if it had depended only on me, I would certainly have chosen another day. But Peyrehorade wanted it, and would not give way. It troubles me, however. Suppose some misfortune should happen? There must be something in it, else why should everybody be afraid of a Friday?"

"Friday," her husband cried, "is the day dedicated to Venus. An excellent day for a wedding. You will notice, my dear colleague, that I only think of my Venus. What an honour! It was on that account I chose Friday. To-morrow, if you are willing, we will offer her a small sacrifice before the ceremony--two ringdoves and incense, if I can find any."

"For shame, Peyrehorade!" interrupted his wife, who was scandalised in the highest degree. "Offer incense to an idol! It would be an abomination! What would be said about you through the countryside?"

"At all events," said M. de Peyrehorade, "you will let me put a wreath of roses and lilies on her head?

"*Manibus date lilia plenis.*

You see, monsieur, the charter is but a vain thing. We have no religious freedom."

The arrangements for the morrow were regulated in the following manner. Everyone had to be ready and dressed for the wedding at ten o'clock prompt. After taking chocolate we were to be driven to Puygarrig. The civil marriage was to take place at the village registry, and the religious ceremony in the Castle chapel. After that there would be luncheon. Then we were to spend the time as we liked until seven o'clock, when we were all to return to M. de Peyrehorade's house, where the two families would sup together. The remainder of the time would naturally be spent in eating as much as possible, as there would be no dancing.

Ever since eight o'clock I had sat before the Venus, pencil in hand, beginning over again for the twentieth time the head of the statue, without being able to seize the expression. M. de Peyrehorade came and went, giving me advice and repeating his Phoenician derivations. Then he placed some Bengal roses on the pedestal of the statue, and addressed to it, in a tragi-comical air, vows for the couple about to live under his roof. He went in to see about his toilette towards nine o'clock, and at the same time M. Alphonse appeared, well groomed, in a new suit, white gloves, patent-leather shoes, chased buttons and a rose in his button-hole.

"You must take my wife's portrait," he said, leaning over my drawing; "she, too, is pretty."

Then began on the tennis ground, to which I have already referred, a game which at once attracted M. Alphonse's attention. I was tired, and in despair at being unable to reproduce that diabolical face, so I soon left my drawing to watch the players. There were among them several Spanish muleteers who had come the night before. They were men from Aragon and from Navarre, almost all clever players. Although the local players were encouraged by the presence and advice of M. Alphonse, they were very soon beaten by these new champions. The patriotic onlookers were filled with concern, and M. Alphonse looked at his watch. It was still only half-past nine. His mother was not ready yet. He hesitated no longer, threw off his coat, asked for a vest, and challenged the Spaniards. I looked at him with amusement and in some surprise.

"The honour of our country must be upheld," he said.

Then I saw how very handsome he was. He was roused to passion. The toilette, which had just now filled his thoughts to the exclusion of everything else, was completely forgotten. A few minutes before he hardly dared turn his head, for fear of spoiling his cravat. Now he thought nothing of his curled hair or of his beautifully got up frilled shirt. And his *fiancée*! I really believe that, if necessary, he would have adjourned the wedding. I saw him hastily put on a pair of sandals, turn up his sleeves, and with a self-satisfied manner range himself at the head of the vanquished party, like Cæsar when he rallied his soldiers at Dyrrachium. I leapt the hedge and took up a position comfortably under the shade of a nettle tree in such a way as to be able to see both camps.

Contrary to general expectation, M. Alphonse missed the first ball; true, it grazed the ground, and bound with surprising force near one of the players from Aragon, who seemed the head of the Spaniards.

He was a man of about forty, strong, yet spare in appearance; he stood six feet high, and his olive skin was of almost as deep a tint as the bronze of the Venus.

M. Alphonse threw his racquet on the ground in a furious rage.

"It is this cursed ring!" he cried, "which pressed into my finger and made me miss a sure thing."

With some difficulty he took off his diamond ring, and I went nearer to take it, but he forestalled me, ran to the Venus, slipped the ring on its fourth finger, and retook his position at the head of his townsmen.

He was pale, but cool and determined. From that time he made no more fouls, and the Spaniards were completely beaten. The enthusiasm of the spectators was a fine sight: some uttered shrieks of delight and threw their caps in the air: others shook hands with him and called him the pride of their countryside. If he had repulsed an invasion, I doubt if he would have received heartier or more sincere congratulations. The disappointment of the vanquished added still more to the brilliance of his victory.

"We must have another match, my fine fellow," he said to the muleteer from Aragon in a condescending tone; "but I must give you odds."

I would have preferred M. Alphonse to be more modest, and I was almost sorry for his rival's humiliation.

The Spanish giant felt the insult keenly; I saw him go pale under his tanned skin. He looked miserably at his racquet and ground his teeth; then, in a choking voice he said, "Me lo pagarás."^[1]

The voice of M. de Peyrehorade interrupted his son's triumph; my host was extremely astonished not to find him superintending the preparation of the new carriage, and was even more surprised to see him with racquet in hand, flushed from the game.

M. Alphonse ran to the house, bathed his face and hands, put on his new coat again and his patent-leather shoes, and five minutes after we were in full trot on the road to Puygarrig. All the tennis players of the town and a large crowd of spectators followed us with shouts of joy. The stout horses which drew us could hardly keep ahead of these dauntless Catalonians.

We were at Puygarrig, and the procession was forming into order to walk to the registry when M. Alphonse suddenly put his hand up to his head and whispered to me--

"What a blunder! I have forgotten the ring! It is on Venus's finger, devil take her! Do not tell my mother, whatever happens. Perhaps she will not notice the omission."

"You could send someone for it," I said.

"No! my servant has stayed behind at Ille. I dare hardly trust these fellows here with twelve hundred francs of diamonds. What a temptation that will be to someone! Besides, what would the people here think of my absent-mindedness? They would make fun of me. They would call me the husband of the statue.... If only no one steals it! Fortunately, the idol frightens the young rascals. They dare not go within arm's length of her. Well, it doesn't matter, I have another ring."

The two ceremonies, civil and religious, were accomplished with suitable state. Mademoiselle de Puygarrig received the ring which had belonged to a Paris milliner, little thinking that her fiancé had sacrificed another's love-token to her. Then we sat down and drank, ate and sang for long enough. I was sorry the bride had to bear the coarse jollity which went on all around her; however, she took it with a better face than I should have thought possible, and her embarrassment was neither awkward nor affected. Possibly courage springs up under occasions that need it.

The banquet broke up Lord knows when--somewhere about four o'clock. The men went for a walk in the park, which was a magnificent one, or watched the peasants of Puygarrig dance on the Castle lawn, decked in their gala dresses.

In this way we passed several hours. In the meantime the women thronged round the bride, who showed them her wedding presents. Then she changed her toilette, and I noticed that she covered up her beautiful hair with a cap and a hat with feathers in it, for wives are most particular to don as quickly as possible those adornments which custom has forbidden them to wear when they are still unmarried.

It was nearly eight o'clock when we were ready to go back to Ille. But there was a pathetic scene first between Mademoiselle de Puygarrig and her aunt, who had been a mother to her, and was of advanced age and very religious: she had not been able to go to the town with us. At her departure she gave her niece a touching sermon on her wifely duties, which resulted in a flood of tears and endless embracings. M. de Peyrehorade compared this parting to the Rape of the Sabines. However, we got off at last, and during the journey everyone exerted himself to cheer up the bride and make her laugh, but in vain.

At Ille supper awaited us; and what a supper! If the morning's coarse revel had shocked me, I was still more disgusted by the quips and jokes which circled round the bride and bridegroom. The bridegroom, who had disappeared for an instant before sitting down to supper, was pale and as chilly as an iceberg. He drank the old wine of Collioure constantly, which is almost as strong as brandy. I was on one side of him, and felt I must warn him--

"Do take care. They say this wine--"

I don't know what silly thing I said to him to show myself in harmony with the merry-makers.

"When they get up from the table I have something to say to you," he whispered, pushing my knee.

His solemn tone surprised me. I looked at him more attentively, and noticed a strange alteration in his features.

"Do you feel ill?" I asked.

"No."

And he began to drink again.

In the meantime, in the midst of cries and clapping hands, a child of eleven, who had slipped under the table, showed to the company a pretty white and rose-coloured ribbon which she had just taken from the bride's ankle. They called it her garter. It was soon cut into bits and distributed among the young people, who decorated their button-holes with it, according to a very old custom which is still preserved in a few patriarchal families. This made the bride blush to the whites of her eyes. But her confusion reached its height when M. de Peyrehorade, after calling for silence, sang some Catalanian verses to her, which he said were impromptus. I give the sense so far as I understood it.

"What is the matter with me, my friends? Has the wine I have taken made me see double? There are two Venuses here...."

The bridegroom turned round suddenly and looked scared, which set everybody laughing.

"Yes," continued M. de Peyrehorade, "there are two Venuses under my roof. One I found in the earth, like a truffle; the other came down to us from the heavens to share her girdle with us."

He meant, of course, her garter.

"My son, choose between the Roman and the Catalanian Venus which you prefer. The rascal took the Catalanian, the better part, for the Roman is black and the Catalanian is white. The Roman is cold, and the Catalanian sets on fire all who come near her."

This conclusion excited such an uproar of noisy applause and loud laughter that I thought the roof would fall on our heads. There were but three grave faces at the table--those of the wedded pair and mine. I had a splitting headache; for besides, I know not why, a marriage always makes me feel melancholy. This one disgusted me rather, too.

The last couplets were sung by the deputy-mayor, and, I may say, they were very broad; then we went into the salon to witness the departure of the bride, who would soon be conducted to her chamber, as it was nearly midnight.

M. Alphonse drew me aside into the recess of a window, and said, as he turned his eyes away from me--

"You will laugh at me ... but I do not know what is the matter with me.... I am bewitched, devil take it!"

My first thought was that he fancied he was threatened with some misfortune of the nature of those referred to by Montaigne and Madame de Sévigné: "The whole realm of love is filled with tragic stories."

I thought to myself that this kind of mishap only happens to men of genius.

"You have drunk too much Collioure wine, my dear M. Alphonse," I said.
"I warned you."

"That may be. But this is something much more terrible."

His voice was broken, and I thought he was quite drunk.

"You know my ring?" he continued, after a pause.

"Yes. Has it been taken?"

"No."

"Therefore you have it?"

"No--I--I could not get it off the finger of that devil of a Venus."

"Nonsense! you did not pull hard enough."

"Yes, I did.... But the Venus ... has clenched her finger."

He looked at me fixedly with a haggard expression, and leant against the framework to keep himself from falling.

"What a ridiculous tale!" I said. "You pushed the ring on too far.
To-morrow you must use pincers, only take care not to injure the statue."

"No, I tell you. The finger of Venus has contracted and bent up; she closed her hand, do you hear?... She is my wife apparently, because I gave her my ring.... She will not give it back."

I shivered suddenly, and for a moment my blood ran cold. Then the deep

sigh he gave sent a breath of wine into my face and all my emotion disappeared.

"The wretched man is completely drunk," I thought.

"You are an antiquarian, Monsieur," the bridegroom added in dismal tones; "you know all about such statues.... There is perhaps some spring, some devilish catch, I do not know of. If you would go and see."

"Willingly," I said. "Come with me."

"No, I would rather you went by yourself."

So I left the salon.

The weather had changed during supper, and rain began to fall heavily. I was going to ask for an umbrella, when I stopped short and reflected. "I should be a great fool," I said to myself, "to go and verify the tale of a tipsy man! Perhaps, besides, he intended to play some stupid joke on me to amuse the country people; and at the least I should be wet through to the skin and catch a bad cold."

I cast a glance on the dripping statue from the door, and went up to my room without returning to the salon. I went to bed, but sleep was long in coming. All the scenes that had occurred during the day returned to my mind. I thought of that beautiful, innocent young girl given up to a drunken brute. "What a detestable thing," I said to myself, "is a marriage of convenience! A mayor puts on a tricoloured sash, and a priest a stole, and behold, the noblest of girls may be dedicated to the Minotaur. What can two beings who do not love each other say at such a moment, a moment that lovers would buy at the price of life itself? Can a wife ever love a man whom she has once discovered is coarse-minded? First impressions can never be obliterated, and I am certain M. Alphonse deserves to be hated."

During my monologue, which I abridge considerably, I had heard much coming and going about the house, doors open and shut, and carriages go away; then I thought I could hear the light steps of several women upon the staircase proceeding to the end of the passage opposite my room. It was probably the procession leading the bride to bed. Then they went downstairs again, and Madam de Peyrehorade's door shut. "How unhappy and strangely ill at ease that poor girl must feel!" I said to myself. I turned over on my bed in a bad temper. A bachelor cuts but a poor figure at a house where there is a wedding going on.

Silence had reigned for a long while, when it was interrupted by heavy steps coming up the stairs. The wooden stairs creaked loudly.

"What a clumsy lout!" I cried. "I bet he will fall down stairs."

Then all became quiet again. I took up a book to change the current of my thoughts. It was a treatise on the Statistics of the Department, embellished with a preface by M. de Peyrehorade on the "Druidical Monuments of the Arrondissement of Prades." I fell into a doze at the third page.

I slept badly and waked several times. It must have been five in the morning, and I had been awake more than twenty minutes when the cock began to crow. Day had dawned. Then I distinctly heard the same heavy steps and the same creaking of the stairs that I had heard before I went to sleep. It struck me as very strange. I tried amidst my yawning to guess why M. Alphonse should rise so early; I could not think of any reason at all likely. I was going to close my eyes again when my attention was afresh excited by strange trampings, which were soon intermingled with the ringing of bells and the banging of doors, and then I could distinguish confused cries.

The drunken bridegroom must have set fire to the house! And at this reflection I leapt out of bed.

I dressed rapidly and went into the corridor. From the opposite end proceeded cries and wailings, and one piercing cry sounded above all the others--"My son! my son!" Evidently some accident had happened to M. Alphonse. I ran to the bridal-chamber; it was full of people. The first sight which met my eyes was the young man, half-dressed, stretched across the bed, the wood of which was broken. He was livid and motionless, and his mother wept and cried by his side. M. de Peyrehorade was busy rubbing his son's temples with eau de Cologne and holding smelling salts under his nose. Alas! his son had been dead a long time. Upon a couch at the other end of the room was the bride in the grip of terrible convulsions. She uttered inarticulate cries, and two strapping servants had the greatest difficulty in holding her down.

"My God!" I exclaimed, "what has happened?"

I went to the bedside and raised the body of the unfortunate young man; he was already cold and stiff. His clenched teeth and black face denoted the most frightful agony. It could be easily seen that his death had been violent and his agony terrible. There was, however, no trace of blood on his clothes. I opened his shirt and found a livid mark on his breast, which extended down his sides and back. One would have thought he had been strangled by a band of iron. My foot stumbled on something hard which was under the rug; I stooped and saw the diamond ring.

I led M. de Peyrehorade and his wife away into their room; then I had the bride carried out.

"You have a daughter left," I said to them; "you must give all your care to her." I then left them to themselves.

There seemed to me no doubt that M. Alphonse had been the victim of an assassination, and the perpetrators must have found some means to get into the bride's room during the night. Those bruises, however, on the chest and the circular direction of them puzzled me much, for neither a stick nor a bar of iron could have produced them. Suddenly I recollect ed to have heard that in Valence the bravoes use long leather bags full of fine sand to smother people whom they want to kill. Soon, too, I remembered the muleteer from Aragon and his threat, though I could hardly think that he would take such a terrible vengeance on a light jest.

I went into the house and hunted all over for any traces of their having broken into the house, but I found none whatever. I went to the garden to see if the assassins had got in from there, but I could not find any sure indication. Last night's rain had, moreover, so soaked the ground that it would not have retained the clearest imprint. But I noticed, notwithstanding, several deep footmarks in the earth; they were in two contrary directions, but in the same line, beginning at the corner of the hedge next to the tennis ground and ending at the front door to the house. These might have been the footmarks made by M. Alphonse when he went to look for his ring on the statue's finger. On the other side the hedge at that spot was not so thick, and it must have been here that the murderers made their escape. Passing and repassing in front of the statue, I stopped short a second to look at it. I confess that this time I could not look at its expression of ironical wickedness without fear, and my head was so full of the ghastly scenes I had just witnessed that I seemed to be looking at an infernal divinity which gloated over the misfortunes that had fallen on the house.

I regained my room and remained there until noon. Then I went down and asked for news of my host and hostess. They were a little calmer. Mademoiselle de Puggarrig--or rather the widow of M. Alphonse--had regained consciousness; she had even spoken to the magistrate of Perpignan, then on a tour of inspection in Ille, and this magistrate had taken down her statement. He asked me for mine. I told him what I knew, and did not conceal my suspicions regarding the muleteer from Aragon. He gave orders for his instant arrest.

"Have you learnt anything from Madam Alphonse?" I asked the magistrate, when my deposition had been taken down and signed.

"That unhappy young lady has gone mad," he said, with a sad smile; "mad, completely mad. See what she told me:--

"'She had been in bed,' she said, 'for some moments with the curtains drawn, when the bedroom door opened and someone came in.' Now Madam Alphonse lay on the side of the bed, with her face turned to the wall. She did not stir, supposing it to be her husband. In a second the bed creaked as though it were burdened with an enormous weight. She was terribly frightened, but dared not turn round. Five minutes, or perhaps

ten--she could not tell how long--passed. Then she made an involuntary movement, or else the other person who was in the bed made one, and she felt the touch of something as cold as ice--these are her very words. She sat up in the bed, trembling in every limb. Shortly after the door opened again, and someone entered, who said, 'Good night, my little wife,' and soon after the curtains were drawn. She heard a stifled cry. The person who was in bed by her side sat up, and seemed to stretch out its arms in front. Then she turned her head round ... and saw, so she says, her husband on his knees by the bed, with his head as high as the pillow, in the arms of a green-looking giant who was strangling him with all its might. She said--and she repeated it to me over and over twenty times, poor lady!--she said that she recognised ... Can you guess? The bronze statue of Venus belonging to M. de Peyrehorade.... Since it came into the country everybody dreams of it, but I will proceed with the story of the unhappy mad girl. She lost consciousness at this sight, and probably for some time her reason. She cannot in any way tell how long she remained in a faint. When she came to she saw the phantom again--or the statue, as she persists in calling it--motionless, its legs and the lower half of the body in the bed, the bust and arms stretched out before it, and between its arms her lifeless husband. A cock crew, and then the statue got out of the bed, dropped the dead body, and went out. Madam Alphonse hung on to the bell, and you know the rest."

They brought in the Spaniard; he was calm, and defended himself with much coolness and presence of mind. He did not attempt to deny the remark I heard; he explained it by pretending that he meant nothing by it, but that on the following day, when he was more rested, he would have won a tennis match against his victor. I remember that he had added--

"A native of Aragon does not wait for his revenge till to-morrow when he is insulted. Had I thought M. Alphonse meant to insult me, I should have immediately stabbed him with my knife to the heart."

His shoes were compared with the footmarks in the garden; but his shoes were much larger than the marks.

Finally, the innkeeper with whom the man had lodged averred that he had spent the whole of that night in rubbing and doctoring one of his sick mules.

Moreover, this man from Aragon was quite noted and well known in the countryside, to which he came annually to trade. He was therefore released with many apologies.

I had forgotten the deposition of a servant who had been the last to see M. Alphonse alive. He saw him go upstairs to his wife, and he had called the man and asked him in an anxious manner if he knew where I was. Then M. Alphonse heaved a sigh, and stood for a moment in silence, adding afterwards--

"Well, the devil must have carried him off too!"

I asked this man if M. Alphonse had his diamond ring on when he spoke to him. The servant hesitated before he replied; then he said that he thought not, that at all events it had not attracted his attention. "If he had worn that ring," he added, correcting himself, "I should certainly have noticed it, because I believed that he had given it to Madam Alphonse."

Whilst I interrogated this man I felt a little of the superstitious terror that Madam Alphonse's deposition had spread throughout the house. The magistrate looked at me and smiled, and I refrained from pressing my questions any further.

A few hours after the funeral of M. Alphonse I prepared to leave Ille. M. de Peyrehorade's carriage was to take me to Perpignan. In spite of his state of feebleness the poor old man would accompany me to the gate of his grounds. He walked to it in silence, hardly able to drag himself along even with the help of my arm. Just as we were parting I cast a last glance at the Venus. I could see plainly that my host, although he did not share the terrors and hatred that his family felt for it, would like to get rid of the object that would ever afterwards remind him of a frightful disaster. I resolved to try and persuade him to put it in a museum. I was hesitating to begin the subject when M. de Peyrehorade mechanically turned his head in the direction in which he saw me looking so attentively. He saw the statue, and immediately burst into tears. I embraced him, and, without venturing to say a single word, I stepped into the carriage.

Since my departure I have never learnt that anything was discovered to throw light on this mysterious catastrophe.

M. de Peyrehorade died some months after his son. He bequeathed me his manuscripts in his will, which some day I may publish. But I have not been able to find the treatise relating to the inscriptions on the Venus.

* * * * *

P.S.--My friend M. de P. has just written to me from Perpignan to tell me that the statue no longer exists. After her husband's death, the first thing Madam de Peyrehorade did was to have it melted down and made into a bell, and in this fresh form it is used in the church at Ille. But, adds M. de P., it would seem that an evil fate pursues those who possess that piece of bronze. Since that bell began to ring in Ille the vines have twice been frost-bitten.

1837. [1] "But you will pay for it."



GRÉGOIRE LE ROY.

1862--.

THE SPINSTER PAST.

The old woman spins, and her wheel
Is prattling of old, old things;
As though to a doll she sings,
And memories over her steal.

The hemp is yellow and long,
The old woman spins the thread,
Bending her white, weary head
Over the wheel's lying song.

The wheel goes round with a whirl,
The yellow hemp is unwound,
She turns it round and round,
She is playing like a girl.

The yellow hemp is unwound,
She sees herself a girl,
As blonde as the skeins that whirl,
She is dancing round and round.

The wheel rolls round with a whirr,
And the hemp is humming as well,
She hears an old lover tell
And whisper his love for her.

Her tired hands rest above
The wheel, its spinning is done,
And with the hemp are spun
Her memories of love.

MAURICE MAETERLINCK.

1862--.

THE HOTHOUSE.

O hothouse in the forest deeps!
And your doors for ever closed!
And all there is beneath your dome!
And under my soul in your analogies!

The thoughts of a princess who is hungry,
The weariness of a sailor in the desert,
A brass band at the windows of incurables.

Go to the waggiest corners!
You think of a woman fainted on a day of harvest,
There are postillions in the courtyard of the hospital;
Afar goes by a hunter of elks, become a nurse.

Look around in the moonlight!
(O nothing here is in its place!)
You think of a mad woman before her judges,
A man-of-war at full sail on a canal,
Birds of night on lilies,
A knell at noon,
(Down yonder under these bell-glasses!)
A halting-place of sick men on the moorlands,
An odour of ether on a sunny day.

My God! my God! when shall we have the rain,
And the snow and the wind in the hothouse!

ALBERT MOCKEL.

1866--.

THE SONG OF RUNNING WATER.

"The light that my embanking meadow laves
Over me like a purer billow glides.
Naked in its limpid and transparent waves,
It is the magnifying image wherein I
Am the diaphanous shadow of the sky.

O beam!... O dream of fire that fills me ...
He, my heroic vow that with emotion thrills me,
Comes!... but when his flame has lapped me wholly,
From over me he rises, fleeing slowly,
And in my being I can hear a being die.

Beautiful is the forest, whose
O'er-leaning leaves temper my languid heat,
Stripped by the wind of gold he strews,
And myriad leaves are from each other singled,
Dancing to fall upon their glancing selves,
And playfully to emulate the frivolous deceit
Of a bird's pinion with my waters mingled.

Breezes, trills of songbirds warbling with a breast that wells,
All that lives and makes the forest ring retells
The melody I murmur to my tall reed-grasses,
Aery music that its spirit glasses.

O forest! O sweet forest, thou invitest me to rest
And linger in thy shade with moss and shavegrass dressed,
Imprisoning me in swoon of soft caresses
That o'er me droop thy dense and leafy tresses.

But on I glide, I go, and, fretful,
Pass under thee, gliding away my life forgetful.
The evanescent soul, the soul where thou wert glassed,
Fades, and leaves my sealed eyes nothing of the past.

Far away from me are gone
All the glimpses that upon me shone.
To other forests and to other lights,
Shaking my hair from fall to fall, from spate to spate,
I glide with hands untied, and empty-eyed,
With endless hours that fetter and control my fate.

Wandering shadow of a reverie banked and pent,
Sister of all those whom my waves entrap,
Intangible as a soul, and, like a soul,
Unfit to seize, I roll
Garlands of scattered memories, whose scent
Dies in a bitter sap.

And neither who I am nor whence I am I know ...
Under my fleeting images lives but one being,
That winds with all my windings whither they are fleeing ...
O thou whose tired feet I have bathed, and heavy brow,
And the caress of avid hands,--
O passer-by, my brother listening to me now!--

Hast thou not seen, from the waste mountains' threshold
to my far sea-sands,
Born and reborn in me, strong as the whipped flood-tides
of love's emotion,
The broad, unbroken current rolling me to the ocean?

Hast thou not seen, force without end, immortal rhythm and rhyme,
Desire impelling me beyond the bounds of Time?"

all from: The Project Gutenberg eBook, *Contemporary Belgian Poetry*, by Various,
Edited and Translated by Jethro Bithell



THE LION AND THE SUN

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Love and Other Stories*, by Anton Chekhov
Translated by Constance Garnett

IN one of the towns lying on this side of the Urals a rumour was afloat that a Persian magnate, called Rahat-Helam, was staying for a few days in the town and putting up at the "Japan Hotel." This rumour made no impression whatever upon the inhabitants; a Persian had arrived, well, so be it. Only Stepan Ivanovitch Kutsyn, the mayor of the town, hearing of the arrival of the oriental gentleman from the secretary of the Town Hall, grew thoughtful and inquired:

"Where is he going?"

"To Paris or to London, I believe."

"H'm.... Then he is a big-wig, I suppose?"

"The devil only knows."

As he went home from the Town Hall and had his dinner, the mayor sank into thought again, and this time he went on thinking till the evening. The arrival of the distinguished Persian greatly intrigued him. It seemed to him that fate itself had sent him this Rahat-Helam, and that a favourable opportunity had come at last for realising his passionate, secretly cherished dream. Kutsyn had already two medals, and the Stanislav of the third degree, the badge of the Red Cross, and the badge of the Society of Saving from Drowning, and

in addition to these he had made himself a little gold gun crossed by a guitar, and this ornament, hung from a buttonhole in his uniform, looked in the distance like something special, and delightfully resembled a badge of distinction. It is well known that the more orders and medals you have the more you want--and the mayor had long been desirous of receiving the Persian order of The Lion and the Sun; he desired it passionately, madly. He knew very well that there was no need to fight, or to subscribe to an asylum, or to serve on committees to obtain this order; all that was needed was a favourable opportunity. And now it seemed to him that this opportunity had come.

At noon on the following day he put on his chain and all his badges of distinction and went to the 'Japan.' Destiny favoured him. When he entered the distinguished Persian's apartment the latter was alone and doing nothing. Rahat-Helam, an enormous Asiatic, with a long nose like the beak of a snipe, with prominent eyes, and with a fez on his head, was sitting on the floor rummaging in his portmanteau.

"I beg you to excuse my disturbing you," began Kutsyn, smiling. "I have the honour to introduce myself, the hereditary, honourable citizen and cavalier, Stepan Ivanovitch Kutsyn, mayor of this town. I regard it as my duty to honour, in the person of your Highness, so to say, the representative of a friendly and neighbourly state."

The Persian turned and muttered something in very bad French, that sounded like tapping a board with a piece of wood.

"The frontiers of Persia"--Kutsyn continued the greeting he had previously learned by heart--"are in close contact with the borders of our spacious fatherland, and therefore mutual sympathies impel me, so to speak, to express my solidarity with you."

The illustrious Persian got up and again muttered something in a wooden tongue. Kutsyn, who knew no foreign language, shook his head to show that he did not understand.

"Well, how am I to talk to him?" he thought. "It would be a good thing to send for an interpreter at once, but it is a delicate matter, I can't talk before witnesses. The interpreter would be chattering all over the town afterwards."

And Kutsyn tried to recall the foreign words he had picked up from the newspapers.

"I am the mayor of the town," he muttered. "That is the _lord mayor_ ... _municipalais_ ... Vwee? Kompreney?"

He wanted to express his social position in words or in gesture,

and did not know how. A picture hanging on the wall with an inscription in large letters, "The Town of Venice," helped him out of his difficulties. He pointed with his finger at the town, then at his own head, and in that way obtained, as he imagined, the phrase: "I am the head of the town." The Persian did not understand, but he gave a smile, and said:

"Goot, monsieur . . . goot . . ." Half-an-hour later the mayor was slapping the Persian, first on the knee and then on the shoulder, and saying:

"Kompreney? Vwee? As _lord mayor_ and _municipalais_ I suggest that you should take a little _promenage . . . kompreney? Promenage._"

Kutsyn pointed at Venice, and with two fingers represented walking legs. Rahat-Helam who kept his eyes fixed on his medals, and was apparently guessing that this was the most important person in the town, understood the word _promenage_ and grinned politely. Then they both put on their coats and went out of the room. Downstairs near the door leading to the restaurant of the 'Japan,' Kutsyn reflected that it would not be amiss to entertain the Persian. He stopped and indicating the tables, said:

"By Russian custom it wouldn't be amiss . . . _puree, entrekot_, champagne and so on, kompreney."

The illustrious visitor understood, and a little later they were both sitting in the very best room of the restaurant, eating, and drinking champagne.

"Let us drink to the prosperity of Persia!" said Kutsyn. "We Russians love the Persians. Though we are of another faith, yet there are common interests, mutual, so to say, sympathies . . . progress . . . Asiatic markets. . . The campaigns of peace so to say . . ."

The illustrious Persian ate and drank with an excellent appetite, he stuck his fork into a slice of smoked sturgeon, and wagging his head, enthusiastically said: "_Goot, bien._"

"You like it?" said the mayor delighted. "_Bien_, that's capital." And turning to the waiter he said: "Luka, my lad, see that two pieces of smoked sturgeon, the best you have, are sent up to his Highness's room!"

Then the mayor and the Persian magnate went to look at the menagerie. The townspeople saw their Stepan Ivanovitch, flushed with champagne, gay and very well pleased, leading the Persian about the principal streets and the bazaar, showing him the points of interest of the town, and even taking him to the fire tower.

Among other things the townspeople saw him stop near some stone gates with lions on it, and point out to the Persian first the lion, then the sun overhead, and then his own breast; then again he pointed to the lion and to the sun while the Persian nodded his head as though in sign of assent, and smiling showed his white teeth. In the evening they were sitting in the London Hotel listening to the harp-players, and where they spent the night is not known.

Next day the mayor was at the Town Hall in the morning; the officials there apparently already knew something and were making their conjectures, for the secretary went up to him and said with an ironical smile:

"It is the custom of the Persians when an illustrious visitor comes to visit you, you must slaughter a sheep with your own hands."

And a little later an envelope that had come by post was handed to him. The mayor tore it open and saw a caricature in it. It was a drawing of Rahat-Helam with the mayor on his knees before him, stretching out his hands and saying:

"To prove our Russian friendship
For Persia's mighty realm,
And show respect for you, her envoy,
Myself I'd slaughter like a lamb,
But, pardon me, for I'm a--donkey!"

The mayor was conscious of an unpleasant feeling like a gnawing in the pit of the stomach, but not for long. By midday he was again with the illustrious Persian, again he was regaling him and showing him the points of interest in the town. Again he led him to the stone gates, and again pointed to the lion, to the sun and to his own breast. They dined at the 'Japan'; after dinner, with cigars in their teeth, both, flushed and blissful, again mounted the fire tower, and the mayor, evidently wishing to entertain the visitor with an unusual spectacle, shouted from the top to a sentry walking below:

"Sound the alarm!"

But the alarm was not sounded as the firemen were at the baths at the moment.

They supped at the 'London' and, after supper, the Persian departed. When he saw him off, Stepan Ivanovitch kissed him three times after the Russian fashion, and even grew tearful. And when the train started, he shouted:

"Give our greeting to Persia! Tell her that we love her!"

A year and four months had passed. There was a bitter frost, thirty-five degrees, and a piercing wind was blowing. Stepan Ivanovitch was walking along the street with his fur coat thrown open over his chest, and he was annoyed that he met no one to see the Lion and the Sun upon his breast. He walked about like this till evening with his fur coat open, was chilled to the bone, and at night tossed from side to side and could not get to sleep.

He felt heavy at heart.

There was a burning sensation inside him, and his heart throbbed uneasily; he had a longing now to get a Serbian order. It was a painful, passionate longing.



UNNATURAL SELECTION OR THE ORIGIN OF RACE

from: The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Married*, by August Strindberg

The Baron had read in *_The Slaves of Life_* with disgust and indignation that the children of the aristocracy were bound to perish unless they took the mothers' milk from the children of the lower classes. He had read Darwin and believed that the gist of his teaching was that through selection the children of the aristocracy had come to be more highly developed representatives of the genus "Man." But the doctrine of heredity made him look upon the employment of a foster-mother with aversion; for might not, with the blood of the lower classes, certain conceptions, ideas and desires be introduced and propagated in the aristocratic nursling? He was therefore determined that his wife should nurse her baby herself, and if she should prove incapable of doing so, the child should be brought up with the bottle. He had a right to the cows' milk, for they fed on his hay; without it they would starve, or would not have come into existence at all. The baby was born. It was a son! The father had been somewhat anxious before he became certain of his wife's condition, for he was, personally, a poor man; his wife, on the other hand, was very wealthy, but he had no claim to her fortune unless their union was blest with a legal heir, (in accordance with the law of entail chap. 00 par. 00). His joy was therefore great and genuine. The baby was a transparent little thoroughbred, with blue veins shining through his waxen skin. Nevertheless his blood was poor. His mother who possessed the figure of an angel, was brought up on choice food, protected by rich furs from all the eccentricities of the climate, and had that aristocratic pallor which denotes the woman of noble descent.

She nursed the baby herself. There was consequently no need to become

indebted to peasant women for the privilege of enjoying life on this planet. Nothing but fables, all he had read about it! The baby sucked and screamed for a fortnight. But all babies scream. It meant nothing. But it lost flesh. It became terribly emaciated. The doctor was sent for. He had a private conversation with the father, during which he declared that the baby would die if the Baroness continued to nurse him, because she was firstly too highly strung, and secondly had nothing with which to feed him. He took the trouble to make a quantitative analysis of the milk, and proved (by equations) that the child was bound to starve unless there was a change in the method of his feeding.

What was to be done? On no account could the baby be allowed to die.

Bottle or foster mother? The latter was out of the question. Let us try the bottle! The doctor, however, prescribed a foster mother.

The best Dutch cow, which had received the gold medal for the district, was isolated and fed with hay; with dry hay of the finest quality. The doctor analysed the milk, everything was all right. How simple the system was! How strange that they had not thought of it before! After all, one need not engage a foster mother a tyrant before whom one had to cringe, a loafer one had to fatten; not to mention the fact that she might have an infectious disease.

But the baby continued to lose flesh and to scream. It screamed night and day. There was no doubt it suffered from colic. A new cow was procured and a fresh analysis made. The milk was mixed with Karlsbad water, genuine Sprudel, but the baby went on screaming.

"There's no remedy but to engage a foster mother," said the doctor.

"Oh! anything but that! One did not want to rob other children, it was against nature, and, moreover, what about heredity?"

When the Baron began to talk of things natural and unnatural, the doctor explained to him that if nature were allowed her own way, all noble families would die out and their estates fall to the crown. This was the wisdom of nature, and human civilization was nothing but a foolish struggle against nature, in which man was bound to be beaten. The Baron's race was doomed; this was proved by the fact that his wife was unable to feed the fruit of her womb; in order to live they were bound to buy or steal the milk of other women. Consequently the race lived on robbery, down to the smallest detail.

"Could the purchase of the milk be called robbery? The purchase of it!"

"Yes, because the money with which it was bought was produced by labour. Whose labour? The people's! For the aristocracy didn't work."

"The doctor was a socialist!"

"No, a follower of Darwin. However, he didn't care in the least if they called him a socialist. It made no difference to him."

"But surely, purchase was not robbery! That was too strong a word!"

"Well, but if one paid with money one hadn't earned!"

"That was to say, earned by manual labour?"

"Yes!"

"But in that case the doctor was a robber too!"

"Quite so! Nevertheless he would not hold back with the truth! Didn't the Baron remember the repenting thief who had spoken such true words?"

The conversation was interrupted; the Baron sent for a famous professor. The latter called him a murderer straight out, because he had not engaged a nurse long ago.

The Baron had to persuade his wife. He had to retract all his former arguments and emphasize the one simple fact, namely, the love for his child, (regulated by the law of entail).

But where was a foster mother to come from? It was no use thinking of looking for one in town, for there all people were corrupt. No, it would have to be a country girl. But the Baroness objected to a girl because, she argued, a girl with a baby was an immoral person; and her son might contract a hereditary tendency.

The doctor retorted that all foster mothers were unmarried women and that if the young Baron inherited from her a preference for the other sex, he would grow into a good fellow; tendencies of that sort ought to be encouraged. It was not likely that any of the farmers' wives would accept the position, because a farmer who owned land, would certainly prefer to keep his wife and children with him.

"But supposing they married a girl to a farm labourer?"

"It would mean a delay of nine months."

"But supposing they found a husband for a girl who had a baby?"

"That wasn't a bad idea!"

The Baron knew a girl who had a baby just three months old. He knew her only too well, for he had been engaged for three years and had

been unfaithful to his fiancee by "doctor's orders." He went to her himself and made his suggestion. She should have a farm of her own if she would consent to marry Anders, a farm labourer, and come to the Manor as foster mother to the young Baron. Well, was it strange that she should accept the proffered settlement in preference to her bearing her disgrace alone? It was arranged there and then that on the following Sunday the banns should be read for the first, second and third time, and that Anders should go home to his own village for two months.

The Baron looked at her baby with a strange feeling of envy. He was a big, strong boy. He was not beautiful, but he looked like a guarantee of many generations to come. The child was born to live but it was not his fate to fulfil his destination.

Anna wept when he was taken to the orphanage, but the good food at the Manor (her dinner was sent up to her from the dining-room, and she had as much porter and wine as she wanted) consoled her. She was also allowed to go out driving in the big carriage, with a footman by the side of the coachman. And she read *A Thousand and One Nights*. Never in all her life had she been so well off.

After an absence of two months Anders returned. He had done nothing but eat, drink, and rest. He took possession of the farm, but he also wanted his Anna. Couldn't she, at least, come and see him sometimes? No, the Baroness objected. No nonsense of that sort!

Anna lost flesh and the little Baron screamed. The doctor was consulted.

"Let her go and see her husband," he said.

"But supposing it did the baby harm?"

"It won't!"

But Anders must be "analysed" first. Anders objected.

Anders received a present of a few sheep and was "analysed."

The little Baron stopped screaming.

But now news came from the orphanage that Anna's boy had died of diphtheria.

Anna fretted, and the little Baron screamed louder than ever. She was discharged and sent back to Anders and a new foster mother was engaged.

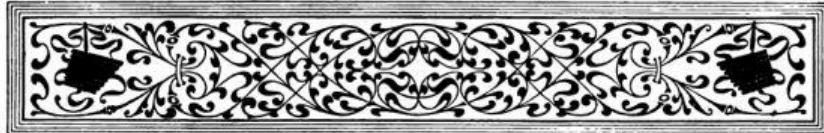
Anders was glad to have his wife with him at last, but she had contracted expensive habits. She couldn't drink Brazilian coffee, for

instance, it had to be Java. And her health did not permit her to eat fish six times a week, nor could she work in the fields. Food at the farm grew scarce.

Anders would have been obliged to give up the farm after twelve months, but the Baron had a kindly feeling for him and allowed him to stay on as a tenant.

Anna worked daily at the Manor and frequently saw the little Baron; but he did not recognise her and it was just as well that he did not. And yet he had lain at her breast! And she had saved his life by sacrificing the life of her own child. But she was prolific and had several sons, who grew up and were labourers and railway men; one of them was a convict.

But the old Baron looked forward with anxiety to the day on which his son should marry and have children in his turn. He did not look strong! He would have been far more reassured if the other little Baron, the one who had died at the orphanage, had been the heir to the estates. And when he read *The Slaves of Life* a second time, he had to admit that the upper classes live at the mercy of the lower classes, and when he read Darwin again he could not deny that natural selection, in our time, was anything but natural. But facts were facts and remained unalterable, in spite of all the doctor and the socialists might say to the contrary.



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